

Ever Wonder About Mayor Cole's Pension?

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President Devaney submitted the following piece to The Southern Illinoisan:

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Guest column
500 Words

By Patrick Devaney

For the second time this summer, the Southern Illinoisan has taken aim at public safety employee pensions with no regard to the public pensions being funded for other Carbondale city employees.

At the behest of the Illinois Municipal League and its drumbeat for the elimination of pension benefits for police and firefighters, the Southern has focused solely on the pensions of people who protect the lives and property of Carbondale residents.

It is past time to set the record straight.

First of all, last May the Illinois General Assembly took a serious and good faith step toward trying to reform public safety pensions in Illinois. As president of the Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois, I sat in negotiations as legislators worked to hammer out a comprehensive reform package that would have actually provided immediate property tax relief for Illinois citizens.

However, the Illinois Municipal League, which has led elected officials like Mayor Brad Cole to fight pension reform everywhere in Illinois, walked out on the talks at the 11th hour. Don't take my word for it. Here are the words of the bill's chief sponsor, Senator Terry Link of Waukegan:

The negotiations, however, have reached an impasse. Why? The municipalities oppose provisions that require them to make fair and just employer contributions, just as police officers and firefighters are required to do. The proposal does not require municipalities to make their required contributions by 2015, thus giving financially troubled local government time to bring their fiscal houses in order.

AFFI has led the fight for three years to reform public safety pensions. We were prepared to support a reasonable compromise. But the municipal league walked out and the legislation died as the General Assembly adjourned.

Meanwhile, the Southern Illinoisan has apparently swallowed the municipal league's argument with relish. If not, then why has the newspaper focused solely on public safety pensions?

After your newspaper's last assault on police and firefighters, our organization obtained records that clearly indicate that police and fire pension contributions by the City of Carbondale are right in line with the employer contributions for all city employees. And, yes, those employees include Mayor Cole's

IMRF pension.

According to records obtained from the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund and the City of Carbondale, these are the employer's contributions to the pensions of Carbondale city employees other than police and firefighters:

Year	IMRF	Social Security	Total
2004	\$357,819	\$404,480	\$762,300 (281 employees)
2009	\$745,436	\$466,026	\$1,211,462 (244 employees)

Your readers deserve to know that police and firefighters do not collect Social Security benefits. Therefore, unlike other Carbondale municipal employees, the city's only employer contribution is to our pension fund.

That said, the city still fails year after year to meet its full obligation to police and firefighter pension funds. So when comparing pensions, please exercise your obligation to your readers and let them know that retirement contributions for the other Carbondale city employees have increased at a rate greater than that for police and firefighters.

Let the taxpayers decide who's more important to their health and safety: police and firefighters or politicians.

Patrick Devaney is president of the Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois.

The following link will take you to the changed article printed in today's paper:

http://thesouthern.com/news/opinion/columnists/article_530e6040-b6f2-11df-b73f-001cc4c03286.html

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